

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Beaverhead County Gravel Storage Site
Proposed Implementation Date:	September , 2008
Proponent:	Beaverhead County Road Department
Location:	Section 18, T 13S – R2W
County:	Beaverhead County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Beaverhead County Road Department has requested the use of State Ground in the SW1/4 SW1/4 SW1/4 of Section 18, T13S – R2W in the Centennial Valley for storing of approximately 5,000, to 8,000 cubic yards of gravel. The site would take up between 1.5 and 2 acres of land just north of the North Centennial County Road. Proponent proposes to use a grader to lift and store the top soil on site and redistribute when use of the site is completed. The county is asking for a ten year Land Use License for this proposal.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Nathan Korb, The Nature Conservancy
Patrick Renee, DNRC Archeologist
Fred Stibal, Stibal Ranch Partnership (lessee)
Montana Natural Heritage Program

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

A. **No Action Alternative:** Deny Beaverhead County the right to use State Land for storing gravel.

B. **Action Alternative:** Allow Beaverhead County to use approximately 2 acres of State land in Section 18, T13S – R2W as a gravel storage site. Top soil will be scraped off of the site and stored. Once gravel storage site is no longer needed soil will be spread on disturbed area and seeded with native grass mixture.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The soils where the gravel would be stored are sandy. The area is well drained and rutting is usually not an issue with these types of soils. Soil surveys in this portion of Beaverhead County have not yet been completed.

Top soils will be scraped and stored on the site for reclamation once the storage site is no longer in use. Native grass seed mixture will be spread over the disturbed areas to prevent erosion of the soils.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

The proposed storage site is on higher ground out of any area where water flows. Surface run off from the site is not anticipated. The area where the storage would occur is flat with little run-off potential. No degradation of water quality is expected from this proposal.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

The location of the gravel storage site is isolated and away from any populated areas. There will be a fair amount of dust created from the hauling and storing of the gravel. The hauling will be done within the next month so the duration of the project will be relatively short. In addition dust will occur anytime loads of gravel are hauled onto the County roads for maintenance purposes. The overall impact to the area is small and of short duration. There would be no long term air quality cumulative effects associated with this project.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

There are a number of rare plant species that have been identified near this proposed project. They include painted milkvetch, (*Astragalus ceramicus* var. *apus*), fendler cat's eye (*Cryptantha fendleri*) and Sand wildrye (*Elymus flavescens*) . all three species are found in the Centennial Sandhills which are south and east of this proposed project . The proposed project occurs approximately ¾ of a mile north of the area considered part of the Centennial Sand Hills.

A Montana Heritage search of the proposed gravel storage site didn't identify any rare plants or cover types. The field evaluation that was completed by Chuck Maddox, (Dillon Unit Land Use Specialist) in August of 2005 lists the majority of cover type for the 76.59 acres of State land as follows; Grasses: Bluebunch wheatgrass, Slender wheatgrass, Idaho Fescue, and prairie junegrass, and shrubs: big sage and low sage making up 5-10% of the over all cover type.

The area where the proposed gravel storage site is located was broke for farming at some point in the past but was abandoned as farm ground. All of the water in Metzel Creek was diverted into a constructed ditch and the area was flood irrigated. The flat along the ditch has reverted back to or planted with native grasses. There is less than 5 % sage brush cover type where the ground was broke and where the proposed gravel storage site would be.

This project would cause very little disturbance to ground cover due to it's small size (2acres) and once all of the stored gravel was used the site would be re-vegetated back to natural grasses. A mixture of bluebunch wheatgrass, basin wildrye, and slender wheatgrass will be broadcast seeded on the disturbed areas. In addition Beaverhead County will spray for noxious weeds annually during the life of this permit.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

A NRIS search identified the area as possibly being used by the grey wolf, greater sage grouse, and the pygmy rabbit. Although these species could be present near the proposed project area the gravel storage site has not been identified as critical habitat for any of these species. This project will not have any direct, indirect or cumulative effects to these species due to the projects small footprint.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

The Montana Natural Heritage program was contacted regarding species of concern within the project area. The endangered Gray Wolf was listed as possibly traveling through the area, along with two sensitive species of concern; Greater Sage Grouse, and the Pygmy Rabbit.

Gray Wolf (*Canus Lupus*) Wolves are distributed throughout Southwest Montana. The project would not have any measurable effect on wolf prey or wolves, thus direct, indirect, or cumulative effects are not anticipated.

Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus Urophasianus*) Greater sage Grouse use has been recorded in the project area. The DNRC is not aware of any important breeding leks in the vicinity. If sage-grouse are using the tract, they could be directly disturbed and displaced by activities associated with this project; however, the disturbance would be short term and would not be expected to have a measureable impact on sage grouse. The Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies has identified the amount of canopy cover for sage grouse use as follows; Breeding Habitat 15 -25% sagebrush canopy cover, Brood-rearing Habitat 10- 25% sagebrush canopy cover, and Winter Habitat 10-30% sagebrush canopy cover. The proposed project area has less than 5% canopy cover so it doesn't fit any of the canopy cover types that are ideal for sage grouse use. This is probably due to the area being broke for farming in the past.

Because of this projects small size, the locations lack of prime habitat for sage grouse and the lack of sustained use by the proponent of this project no measurable direct, indirect or cumulative effects to sage grouse would be anticipated as a result of this project.

Pygmy Rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) Pygmy Rabbit's have been sited within ½ mile south of the proposed project area. The project could affect the rabbits during the hauling and storage phase, and when gravel is hauled from the site to roads in the Centennial Valley. The activity however will be of short duration and no measureable direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Patrick Renee Montana DNRC archeologist was contacted concerning this proposal. His search didn't reveal any cultural resource concerns associated with this project.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

This proposal will be visible from the North Centennial County Road. The road however gets very little use due to poor maintenance and seasonal restrictions. The most traffic use is on the South Centennial Valley road for visitors to the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. There are a few ranchers that will pass by the gravel

storage site on a regular basis as well as hunters during the annual Montana big game hunting season. This project however is small (approximately 2acres) and would have very little effect on the over all aesthetics of the Centennial Valley.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

None

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

Montana DNRC Dillon Unit doesn't know of any other projects planned for this area.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The project will increase traffic on the North Centennial Valley county road for approximately 1 month. Truck hauling signs will be put up prior to starting operations. The area is flat, visibility is excellent and traffic use is low. There are very low risks to human health and safety associated with this proposal.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The Project will take two acres of grazing out of production for approximately a ten year period. This would be approximately 06.4 AUM's/year or a total of 6.4 AUMS over the life of the license.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

This project would provide a contractor approximately one month worth of employment.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

None

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

Beaverhead County would be responsible for maintaining this storage site. This would include spraying for noxious weeds, and reclaiming the site once all of the gravel has been used up. Reclamation work would include spreading the topsoil that has been stockpiled on the and broadcast seeding the storage site with a native grass seed mix.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

None

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

None

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

None

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

None

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

None

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

This project will generate \$300.00 / year for the trust for the next ten years. The total revenue generated will be \$3,000. The proposal would also reduce the amount of revenue that is generated from grazing by \$4.44 / year for a total loss of grazing revenue of \$44.41 for the ten year period.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Tim Egan	Date: 9/19/2008
	Title: Dillon Unit Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Issue License for gravel storage

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Significant impacts are not anticipated as a result of the proposed activity. The area to be used has been farmed in the past and consequently the vegetative community is not reflective of surrounding areas. Therefore there are no unusual or critical habitat features associated with the area to be used and the project will affect a very small area.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EIS

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Garry Williams
	Title: Area manager
Signature: /S/ Garry Williams	
Date: 9/24/08	